

# WHO DOES WHAT IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY?

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Don't listen to the old punk-rocker at the end of the bar who tells you to "do it yourself, man". While it's true that in the web age, a hard-working band can go a long way under its own steam, if you're set on interplanetary dominance, you'll need a network of contacts to avoid burnout. If you don't know your pluggers from your promoters, here's our quickfire guide to the key music industry roles, to help you shake the right hands and bang on the right doors. *(Image by John Hult).*

## **The A&R person**

Short for 'artists and repertoire', A&Rs are employed by their record label to scout for the next big thing. This typically involves prowling the club circuit each night, drinking heavily, watching endless sets by hot-tip bands, sifting the duds and snapping up the diamonds. But the A&R's role doesn't end when you scrawl your signature on the recording contract. While you're signed to that label, they'll be your point-man, cheerleader and strategist, involved in everything from your sleeve art to your album campaign.

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## **The publisher**

If you're the band's songwriter, you need a publisher. At a fundamental level, their role is to gather and distribute the royalty payments due when your music is played on TV, film or radio (or in any public space). Some publishing companies go further, too, actively pitching your songs to other artists, or employing a sync team that pushes to get your music considered for the next John Lewis ad. At a time of tanking record sales, **getting a publisher** in your corner can provide a revenue stream to keep the loan sharks off your back.

## **The booking agent**

When your band achieves lift-off, an agent will book your tour, play hardball on your fee, hustle to get you higher up a festival bill, even grease the wheels by arranging travel and accommodation. Be aware that booking agents are paid a percentage of your live take, so they won't touch you until you're into serious venues. Until then, it's down to you to badger every sticky-floored pub in the phone book until someone lets you play after their bingo night.

## **The promoter**

The booking agent works hand-in-glove with the promoter, who is tasked with organising the logistics of a given show, making sure the tickets sell out, then (hopefully) paying you at the end of the night. The promoter takes the financial risk, paying for the gig's upfront costs, from venue hire to security, so don't be surprised when they cream off a healthy profit from your take.

## **The marketing executive**

Sign to a bigger record label and you'll benefit from their in-house marketing team, whose job is to build a buzz around your album campaign with paid-for publicity (eg. adverts in the music press). It might not sound very rock 'n' roll, but you won't be complaining when you see your fanbase quadruple.

## **The press officer**

If you've ever been fobbed off by a busy music journalist, or posted a thousand demos into the void to blanket indifference, you'll start to realise the key industry role of a good press officer. "A great publicist acts as both a cheerleader and a filter," explains Michelle Kerr of Cosa Nostra, the publicity company that represents heavyweights like Alter Bridge and Slipknot. "We'll get you column inches that'll benefit your band, and on the flipside, know what's not worth your time. A good or growing media profile can help assist in finding you great management, a great booking agent or record label interest, so choose wisely and don't just go for someone offering a cheap package."

## **The radio plugger**

Just as magazine offices are piled high with unsolicited CDs, so radio stations can't even begin to process the sheer volume of material that flies through their door. To give your music a better chance of escaping the slush pile, labels will often employ a radio plugger: they'll know all the stations, go drinking with the staff and even have the ear of the DJs. All of which means that when they press your new single into Nick Grimshaw's hand, he's more likely to spin it than bin it.

## **The artist-aggregator**

Not a music industry person, strictly speaking, but in the golden age of streaming, it's vital for unsigned bands to grasp the vital role of the artist-aggregator. If you want to get your songs onto Spotify, firms like [Tunecore](#), [CD Baby](#) and [Ditto Music](#) act as mediators, dealing with licensing and paying your royalties. Of course, they'll take a slice, either as a flat yearly fee or on commission.

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### **The distributor**

Flogging CDs from a rickety merch table is a good start, but a distributor will put your album on shelves in proper record stores, and ensure there's stock available when your band inexplicably blows up in Bangladesh. “We can set up distribution in every country in the world,” says Steve Beatty, managing director of **Plastic Head**. “So you'll be able to walk into a shop in Spain and find a band from Wales.”

### **The manager**

And finally: the poor soul who gets all the headaches. In short, the **manager** does everything, coordinating a band's activities, handling day-to-day business, planning tours, putting out fires, liaising with the label, looking after finances and generally leaving you to write songs while they develop an ulcer. “A good manager acts as a shield for artists so they can bare their soul,” says Marie Trout, wife and manager of US blues legend Walter Trout, “while feeling protected from the blows, stabs and attempts of abuse that are part of the perilous, paradoxical swamp that exists between art and business...”